

A Parliament of Owls

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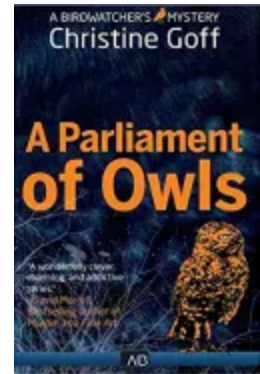
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Christine Goff

House of Strauss 2015

I usually don't write reviews of fiction, particularly not murder mysteries, but in honor of our March focus on owls, I thought you might be interested in the work of a local author, Christine Goff. *A Parliament of Owls* is part of Christine Goff's "Birdwatcher's Mystery" series. There are six books in the series, each set in Colorado. Her most recent is *Death Shoots a Birdie*. I've read them all.

Chris grew up in a small Colorado mountain town and now lives in Denver. She is clearly a birdwatcher! She dedicated *A Parliament of Owls* to "the amazing Colorado birders on the CoBirds list, who helped me pick just the right owls." CoBirds is the listserv of the Colorado Field Ornithologists and a great source of information about local birding activities and interesting bird finds. Chris is an avid backyard birdwatcher but it was the research for this story that helped her discover the bigger world of birding.



Parliament of Owls

The title of *A Parliament of Owls* is based on the term used for a group of owls, any owls. The mystery is set at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and the lead character is a refuge ranger. The tale begins at the Visitor's Center where Ranger Angela Dimato is leading group of children on a field trip. In the narrative, you learn about the history of the Arsenal and its opening as a wildlife refuge but the focus quickly turns to the Burrowing Owls. The children are out to see the owls in the Arsenal's huge prairie dog colony. Angelo describes what the prairie dogs eat and how the owls use the tunnels for their nests. Unfortunately, as soon as the group reaches the owls on the prairie dog town, Angelo spots a body. So starts the murder mystery.

Nonetheless, an education into Burrowing Owls continues through the murder investigation. The police investigating with Angela hear what sounds like a rattlesnake. Angela knows better, shining her flashlight on the burrow where six sets of yellow eyes gleam back. Turns out that Burrowing Owls mimic a rattlesnake buzz to warn off predators.

But Burrowing Owls aren't the only birds featured in *A Parliament of Owls*. The crimes also involve killing Bald Eagles for their feathers. Bald Eagles nest on the Arsenal and are strictly protected. But we learn that selling eagle feathers and parts is highly lucrative for thieves dealing on the black market.

I won't tell you any more—I don't want to spoil the mystery. But *A Parliament of Owls* is an excellent introduction to Goff's work. As birders, you'll find that she knows what she is talking about.